

“Shift: Accelerating on the Discipleship Highway - Introduction”

Scripture: Luke 14:25-35

Graphics: car, highway, shifter

Big Truth: Discipleship is not a passive event or anything we complete in our lifetime. Following Jesus is a process that takes intentional engagement and sacrifice to live fully into the call of Jesus to, “follow me.” There are milestones along the way to

Focus phrase: Intentional discipleship is eyes-wide-open and heart fully engaged, yearning for the coming of the Kingdom on earth.

1. Introduction

- A. One of the great joys in my life is riding my motorcycle. Now, I realize it’s not for everyone, but there aren’t too many things that get my blood pumping faster than strapping on my helmet, and accelerating from 0-“whatever” in just a few seconds, shifting gears from 1 to 2 to 3 to 4...and finally, as I reach cruising speed, 5th gear.
- B. And on a motorcycle, one of the most important tasks is to shift well...to know what speed requires what gear in each acceleration and deceleration.
- C. Last week, I bought THIS shirt (on screen)...CLUTCH...SHIFT...ACCELERATE...REPEAT. I like that!
- D. One day, my mom called me to say that she was buying a Chrysler Crossfire. 3.2-liter, V-6 with 215 horsepower, 6-speed manual transmission. For those of you who aren’t car buffs, don’t worry. All that means is that it could go fast quickly...and then some.
- E. I used to like to drive that car on winding roads in the country because the 18-inch wheels would hug the road and as I shifted from 1st to 6th gear, the car would purr. I think I heard the car actually thanked me once.
- F. It doesn’t matter what you drive, or whether it has a standard or automatic transmission, every car and every motorcycle - heck, even your 10-speed bike you had in high school - must SHIFT in order to accelerate and get from where you are now...to where you want to go in the best possible way.
- G. The Growth and Vision Team here at PUMC, the team charged with helping us see our vision in new ways and then keep us growing for the sake of the mission of Jesus, has launched us on a journey called SHIFT. Over the last 5 years, that team has successfully led us to the vision and building of Centerpoint. Now, we shift our attention and incorporating that process into a broader understanding of HOW to follow Jesus in a far more robust way together.
- H. Just like our cars shift in order to accelerate on the highway of our world, our lives as followers of Jesus can’t stay in 1st gear, revving our engines and

getting nowhere slowly. We need to clutch, shift, accelerate, and repeat until we've moved from exploring who Jesus is to being centered in Jesus' life and ministry in our lives.

- I. This sermon series is called, simply, SHIFT. It'll take us on a journey into intentional discipleship. By intentional discipleship we mean *a life of following Jesus that is eyes-wide-open and heart fully-engaged for accomplishing the mission and vision of the church.*
- J. The subtitle for this series is: *Accelerating on the Discipleship Highway.* And we'll use the image of cars on the highway to represent the forward motion of our lives of discipleship in the church and in the world. There are on ramps to start ministries. There are off ramps to exit ministries that are not effective at achieving our vision and mission. There are lanes to use and signs to pay attention to. And, most importantly for each one of us, there are milestones along the way to help us know how we're growing and what we still need to do to keep growing as followers of Jesus.
- K. We'll be incorporating these into the DNA of the church both from a personal level for each of us, and into each of our ministry teams and leadership positions.
- L. Let's pray as we begin...and for this morning, we aren't going to get into a lot of detail about the milestones and ministries, but will learn as much as we can about what intentional discipleship IS and what Jesus has to say about it.
- M. Let's pray...PRAY!
- N. We always want to start with a grounding in the Word of God. Without the Word of God informing us and transforming us, we are without fuel or even a driver's license to drive the car.
- O. Luke chapter 14, starting in verse 25...the Cost of Discipleship.

2. Scripture

A. READ verses 25-27

- i. When we read this passage of scripture, we have this picture in our minds that Jesus is walking along the road, perhaps, and there's this huge crowd of people behind him all wanting to hear what he has to say. They are hungry for the wisdom and teaching he is offering.
- ii. That may be partially true for some of the people in the crowd, but here's really what I think is happening: this crowd of people saw Jesus heal someone of blindness who they KNEW was blind, fed 10,000+ people on a hillside one day, and who cast out a whole bunch of demons from people who were REALLY scary! So, for entertainment or maybe even to be

healed themselves, they were following Jesus. They weren't all disciples. In fact, I suspect that many of them were NOT.

- iii. And the only thing that was intentional about this act of traveling with Jesus was the fact that they had to physically take a step and keep walking near Jesus.
- iv. But, on THIS day, in THIS location, Jesus simply stopped and turned to the crowd and decided to draw a line in the sand to see if they would ever be true disciples.
- v. As they were walking along, Jesus stopped and turned to this large crowd and said, "Whoever comes to me, YET doesn't hate family and even life itself can't be my disciple." Now, don't get hung up with this phrase. This was a common phrase in that culture. And the word hate here doesn't include anger or hostility. It indicates that if there's a conflict between two things, then as disciple must choose Jesus over even the most sacred of human relationships. R. Alan Culpepper says, "There is no duty higher than commitment to Jesus and to being his disciple."
- vi. Jesus was drawing a line and saying, "Here's what it takes to be a disciple. Are you willing?"
- vii. "Whoever is unwilling to carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." This phrase was probably perplexing to this crowd of wanna-be disciples. Yet the meaning is clear: intentional disciples are willing to give up life itself for the mission of Jesus to rescue and save the lost.
- viii. Seeing the confused look on the faces of most of the people in that crowd, Jesus went on to give two parables...look at verse 28...

B. READ verses 28-33

- i. Counting the cost of building a tower. Counting the cost of preparing to wage war. Jesus used these two parables to say to the crowd, "You may WANT to be a disciple. You may THINK you are a disciple, even. But, have you truly and intentionally decided to do what I am asking you do do?"
- ii. These two parables are not advocating that we build more wealth or build a bigger army. Jesus was illustrating the foolishness of embarking on a venture (building a tower or waging war) without being sure that you can see it through.
- iii. I can't help but think that Jesus is asking them, "Make sure you know what you're agreeing to before you decide to follow me with more than just curiosity and a desire for healing or bread."

- iv. Jesus was telling this crowd that IF they choose to intentionally follow Him there are two conditions: (1) they must do what Jesus does and asks, and (2) there is no turning back without grave consequences.
- v. That's why in verse 34, Jesus keeps going by saying...

C. READ verses 34-35

- i. "Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; they throw it away. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"
- ii. This was directed at those in the crowd who were already disciples. And the point is this: if you are a follower of Jesus, then you're salty - giving flavor to the Kingdom. But if you can't see it through - whether because you turned back and rejected Jesus or can't do what He asks - then you've lost your flavor and will be ineffective as a disciple."

3. Application

- A. We have those in the crowd who were not yet disciples, even though they were traveling with Jesus. We have others in the crowd who HAD made the decision to follow Jesus and begin doing what he said and did.
- B. Jesus turned to them all, and you and me, and said the same thing He said the fishermen along the shore the day he called his first disciples, "Follow me..."
- C. And your response to that invitation is one of three things, (1) No, I don't want to follow you for X, Y, and Z reason. (2) Yes, I will follow you, but on MY terms, or (3) Yes, I will follow you on YOUR terms, Jesus.
- D. If I was to try to fit those three responses into our car/highway metaphor:
 - i. (1) would be me deciding to walk my own way, even though the keys to the car were being handed to me.
 - ii. (2) would be me getting in the car, but driving on my own road, using my own GPS, at the speed and pace I wanted. OR
 - iii. (3) would be me getting in the car, taking the on-ramp to the road that Jesus is asking me to be on as outlined in the Bible, shifting and accelerating to each milestone, intentionally orienting my life to Jesus.
- E. See, we need a clear pathway to discipleship.
- F. We, as individuals and as a church, need to be able to tell each other and anyone who walks into our lives and into the church HOW to follow Jesus. And this is true from the second they check out our website or Facebook page, the moment they login to our Livestream, or the moment they drive in to the parking lot.

- G. An intentional discipleship plan/pathway is the process of making and growing followers of Jesus. It's the highway on which the car and driver - which is you - accelerates and grows. The highway is the church and our ministries and the pathway that allow new people to come to know Jesus.
- H. We've talked a lot over the last few months about vision and mission. If you'll recall, we said that our vision is that **every family and person in our community would have the opportunity to believe in and follow Jesus**. That's our vision.
- I. We do that by accomplishing our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
- J. Over the next 7 weeks, we will dive deep into 6 aspects of of our lives as followers of Jesus - six milestones. Those milestones will help us frame what it means to be and grow as a disciple of Jesus. And remember, this is all because we've agreed to be here and be part of the vision and mission of PUMC.
- K. Those 6 milestones are in three different categories, as evidenced by the graphic on the screen.
- L. The 6 milestones are areas of life that impact our relationship with Jesus. If you are growing in these 6 areas, then you are accelerating on the discipleship highway and intentionally making yourself available for use in God's kingdom work in our church and community.
- M. The 6 milestones are: A life of Worship, a life of Community, a life of Openness, a life of Obeying, a life of Service, and a life of Sharing.
- i. Worship and Community make us part of the body of Christ, the church.
 - ii. Openness and Obeying make us more like Jesus.
 - iii. And, Service and Sharing allow us to join Jesus in ministry.
- N. In each of those milestones, we will be take time to do self-reflection. We will ask ourselves how we're doing - to check the oil and tire pressure, so to speak. The four categories are Exploring, Following, Becoming, and Centered.
- O. Each one of us has our own understanding of where we are with each of the milestones. Someone might we really centered on Jesus in personal and corporate worship, but might be still exploring a life of sharing or openness.
- P. Each week, we will take a closer look at each milestone and begin to ask ourselves where we're at.
- Q. Let me say, honestly and transparently, that this process will be as fruitful as we each make it. It really is all about intentionality. Our default mode as humans is to allow church to be something that we receive...something that we attend or even learn from.

- R. What the Growth and Vision Team is now asking us to do is to accelerate on the discipleship highway - to move forward together in our willingness to grow so that every family has the opportunity to believe in and follow Jesus. It doesn't matter how old you are, how long or short you've been a Christian, how much you know or don't know about the Bible, or how many seminary degrees or churches you've attended. This is about today being the beginning of something that will last the rest of your life.
- S. If that sounds dramatic, it is. Jesus is calling the Panama UMC to get increase our discipleship and make an even bigger impact in our community. That begins with Jesus in you and me.

4. Conclusion

- A. Jesus said in John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."
- B. Accelerating on the discipleship highway, growing in each milestone, is about abundant life in Christ. About eyes-wide-open and heart fully engaged, yearning for the coming of the Kingdom on earth.
- C. I can't think of a better way to begin this process than to come to this table... a table that is fully about Jesus' sacrifice for us - so that we CAN have abundant life, free from sin and death.
- D. As you come, begin reflecting on how you will approach this next 7 weeks. Will you resist and miss it? Or will you eagerly come to be given the keys to a brand new way to accelerate on the discipleship highway?
- E. CLUTCH...SHIFT...ACCELERATE...REPEAT! Let's DO this!
- F. Let's pray...and then Jesus can invite us to the table with Him...